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Guevara: A True Revolutionary

By Lewis H. Dinguid
Washington Post Staff Writer

Che Guevara was, in this age of the guerrilla, the true revolutionary of the Western world.

More than his fellow guerrilla fighter Fidel Castro, Guevara believed in violent revolution as the only path to progress in Latin America, and even the world.

Guevara was more brilliant as a tactician than as a theoretician, but his hyper-Marxist philosophy had great impact on youth frustrated with the continent's stagnation. He said simply that U.S. domination of Latin America corrupted and thwarted it. North American domination could end only in violence. "Let the flag under which we fight be the sacred cause of redeeming humanity," he said, and with that he would quit the wordage and commence to fight.

After playing a role second only to Castro in the startling Cuban victory of 1959, Che tried to settle down as Castro's central banker, then as industries minister. But, by all the evidence, Guevara was too revolutionary either for Castro or his Soviet creditors. Soon Guevara returned to guerrilla warfare.

Traveled Wide

From March 21, 1965, until yesterday, no one could prove even that he was alive or dead, but he was reported to have dabbled in Africa and perhaps Vietnam before taking up his proclaimed ambition of inflaming the Andes.

In January of this year, Regis Debray, disciple of Guevara and Castro, wrote in "Revolution in the Revolution":

"When Comrade Che Guevara once again took up insurrectional work, he accepted on an international level the consequences of the line of action of which Fidel Castro... is the incarnation.

"When Che Guevara reappears, it is hardly risky to assert that it will be as the head of a guerrilla movement, as its unquestioned political and military leader."

Guevara's own copy of the Debray book was captured in a Bolivian jungle cave last August, along with his forged passports. In red ink, Guevara underlined Debray's phrase about him as the unquestioned leader and added in the margin: "as the inexorable condition."

Forgotten Axioms

But, perhaps because Guevara had his eye on a continental revolution this time, he seems to have ignored some of the axioms in his own text, "Guerrilla Warfare," and in Debray's book as well.

Guevara's handbook has been carried into battle by left-wing plotters in Venezuela, Colombia, Peru and Guatemala since he

it in 1960, transcribing the experiences of the Cuban Sierra Maestra.

"The guerrilla preferably should be an inhabitant of the area," said Guevara in his book, but he brought half a dozen high-ranking Cubans down to domineer the Bolivian peasant recruits.

"The guerrilla fighter must risk his life... but he must be cautious and never expose himself unnecessarily," said Guevara, but he published a letter in Havana that all put pinpointed him in Bolivia. And before even a battle was fought he entertained Debray—who, when captured, told of interviewing Guevara.

"The guerrilla fighter must have a health of iron which allows him to resist... adversities without falling ill," said Guevara, but his lifelong asthma slowed him so in the jungle steam that he reportedly had to be carried in the flight from pursuing troops.

Debray quotes Guevara as an authority in warning against establishment of a defense perimeter by the guerrillas, yet Guevara's force launched its Bolivian operation by buying a farm.

The Right Place?

Basically, the question that insurrectionists will ask in off-street bars around the hemisphere is whether Bolivia was the right place to launch the revolution worthy of Guevara.

Debray had doubts about the ripeness of Bolivia, although he said armed struggle is on the agenda of its history. Bolivia already had endured a social revolution in 1952, though it was not a Marxist one.

Recruits captured by Bolivian troops indicate that Guevara was genuinely astonished at the lack of dedication on the part of the peasants.

In the end, it may turn out that Guevara misinterpreted the temper of the Latin Americans. The future of the guerrilla movements in Bolivia and Venezuela will be a clue.

Left His Stamp

But Guevara surely left his stamp on the large and probably growing student wing of the left. While the students have not yet shown his eagerness to take up arms, many of the most talented at this point believe that violence will be needed to accomplish the revolution which the Alliance for Progress attempts in peace.

Even in the United States Guevara has a wide appeal among the New Left. In an upbeat era, his unorthodox way of living fit right in.

Guevara was born in Argentina on June 14, 1928, son of an architect. He took his medical degree in Argentina in 1953 but never practiced, preferring the itinerant life of a conspirator in search of a revolution. He hiked along the

reading heavily in Marxist and Communist literature.

For a time Guevara worked as a sidewalk photographer in Mexico City. His earnings soon were applied to what was to be his major work: the Cuban revolution.

While the Castro brothers and Guevara prepared the invasion of Cuba, Che married the Peruvian conspirator Hilda Gadea, with Raul Castro the best man in Mexico City.

She bore him a daughter but later they were divorced and Guevara married a Cuban school teacher. The two wives and daughter still live in Cuba.

While Ernesto Guevara was there he formally adopted Cuban citizenship and incorporated the Argentine-slang Che—"Mac"—as part of his name.

A First Tour

In early 1965 Che left his industries ministry desk to tour Africa—where one of his more notable speeches called for the Soviet Union to subsidize the underdeveloped world with interest-free loans.

Soon after his return to Havana Guevara disappeared. Nine months later Castro read a letter from him in which he renounced his citizenship and said he had departed for other revolutionary calls. The confusing letter also seemed to imply criticism of Castro, though Cuban Communists claim it carries a mystical and clear message. It is posted on billboards that once advertised Coca-Cola.

Since Che's departure he has become a folk hero on the island, but all official references have carefully linked him with foreign—not Cuban—endeavors.

Castro is trying to build Cuba's farm potential in domestic peace, but Guevara

was for industrialization—and not at all for peace.

Debray, in his book, at one point criticizes an audacious tactic of Guevara in the Cuban war as premature, Guevara seemed a little hurt by that, added in the margin: "To climb Mt. Everest is a premature aspiration also, until you learn the way—the learning, that is the action."

Chi Guevara was a romantic guerrilla who died fighting. One of his axioms covered that also. "Never take prisoners," he said.